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Essex Country Parks re-awarded Green Flag status for Excellence

EXPLORE Essex is delighted to announce that the Essex County Council country parks have been recognised for their excellent standards by being awarded Green Flag status for the third year running.

The Green Flag awards recognise and reward well managed parks throughout the country and demonstrate that the spaces meet the needs of the communities that they serve.

The international award – which is celebrating its 25th anniversary - confirms that the Essex Country Parks, for the third year running, boast the highest possible environmental standards, are well maintained and have excellent visitor facilities.

The Essex Country Parks of Belhus Woods, Cudmore Grove, Danbury, Great Notley, Hadleigh Thorndon and Weald, have all received Green Flag status and will be displaying their flags within the park grounds.

Featuring a diverse range of beautiful landscapes and important wildlife habitats, each country park offers visitors something unique, from the five lakes at Belhus Woods to the fallow deer enclosure at Weald or the mountain bike trails at Hadleigh – a legacy from the 2012 Olympics.

Recent research conducted by BritianThinks - on behalf of Essex County Council and the Essex Climate Action Commission - revealed that 98% of the county's residents agreed that accessing nature and green spaces was important to them.

The Green Flag award announcement coincides with the launch of the Explore Essex and Love Essex '*Love it Here, Don't Leave it Here*' litter campaign which aims to encourage the public to help keep their local communities rubbish free.

Funded by Love Essex and Active Essex - as part of the Active Essex '*Find Your Active*' initiative - almost 200 free litter picking kits will be available for collection from the Essex Country Parks during the half-term holiday.

Councillor Graham Butland, Essex County Councillor Cabinet Member for Devolution, the Arts, Heritage and Culture, said: "We are delighted that our country parks have been awarded the prestigious Green Flag status once again.

"It truly is a testament to our park development managers and rangers – as well as our highly regarded and respected voluntary and friends' groups – and the fantastic work they do which ensures our green spaces meet these high standards.

"We would also encourage members of the public to embrace the '*Love it Here, Don't Leave it here*' campaign and help to ensure our parks remain litter free."

Councillor Peter Schwier, Essex County Council's Climate Czar, added: "It is fantastic that Essex Country Parks have been re-awarded Green Flag status. We know that by providing access to large green spaces in which to walk, cycle, ride, play and run free, Essex Country Parks have an important role in helping people with not only their physical but also their mental health.

"It is well known that exercising outdoors helps people's wellbeing and lowers stress levels, which is why we would continue to encourage people to keep visiting the parks during autumn and winter by wrapping-up warm and enjoying the great outdoors."

For more information about where to collect a litter picking kit please visit www.explore-essex.com/events.

Editors Notes:

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Explore Essex: Explore Essex brings together a unique group of Country Parks and heritage venues which are owned by Essex County Council. Its mission is to deliver a broad range of exciting facilities and activities for the people of Essex with an emphasis on culture, heritage and environment. www.explore-essex.com @exploressex @exploreessex.

Green Flag Awards Scheme

The Green Flag Awards Scheme (<http://greenflagaward.org/>) is run by the environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, under licence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, in partnership in the UK with Keep Scotland Beautiful, Keep Wales Tidy and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. The scheme also operates in an additional 14 countries including Portugal, New Zealand and USA.

Keep Britain Tidy is a leading environmental charity. We set the standard for the management of parks and beaches, inspire people to be litter-free, to waste less and to live more. We run programmes including Eco-Schools, the Green Flag Award for parks and green spaces and the Blue Flag/ Seaside Awards for beaches. To find out more about Keep Britain Tidy, our programmes and campaigns visit www.keepbritaintidy.org.

Any green space that is free to enter and accessible to the public is eligible to enter for a Green Flag Award. Awards are given on an annual basis and winners must apply each year to renew their Green Flag Award status. A Green Flag Community Award recognises quality sites managed by voluntary and community groups. Green Heritage Site accreditation is judged on the treatment of the site's historic features and the standard of conservation.